

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04  
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01  
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 TRSE-00  
OMB-01 AID-05 IO-13 /088 W  
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O 261215Z MAR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2169

INFO AMCONGEN BOMBAY  
AMCONGEN CALCUTTA  
CINCPAC  
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
AMEMBASSY DACCA  
AMCONGEN HONG KONG  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMCONGEN MADRAS  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 4328

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, IN  
SUBJECT: FORMING THE CABINET: LAST-MINUTE COMPROMISE BETWEEN  
DESAI AND RAM COLLAPSES

REF: NEW DELHI 4278

1. THE HOURS FOLLOWING DISPATCH OF REFTEL WERE MARKED BY  
INTENSE MANEUVERING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER DESAI AND CFD  
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CHAIRMAN JAGJIVAN RAM. THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR PATCHING UP  
THE CRACKS WHICH HAD SUDDENLY APPEARED IN THE JANATA/CFD  
FRONT CULMINATED THE EVENING OF MARCH 25 WHEN DESAI VISITED  
BLD PRESIDENT CHARAN SINGH AT WILLINGDON HOSPITAL (WHERE HE  
IS RECOVERING FROM AN ILLNESS) AND THEN CALLED ON RAM. CFD  
GENERAL SECRETARY BAHUGUNA DESCRIBED THE RAM/DESAI MEETING  
AS "VERY CORDIAL". AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT, THE CRISIS SEEMED

RESOLVED WHEN THE ACTING PRESIDENT'S OFFICE ANNOUNCED THE NAMES OF THE 19 PERSONS WHO WOULD COMPRISE DESAI'S CABINET: THEY INCLUDED 16 JANATA PARTY MEMBERS, ONE AKALI DAL MP AND TWO CFD LEADERS, JAGJIVAN RAM AND H.N. BAHUGUNA. THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY WAS SCHEDULED FOR 0930 HOURS MARCH 26 AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN.

2. THE COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENT APPEARED TO HAVE BROKEN DOWN THIS MORNING MARCH 26 WHEN RAM AND BAHUGUNA FAILED TO SHOW UP FOR THE SWEARING IN. IN ADDITION, GEORGE FERNANDES, RAJ NARAIN AND A RELATIVE NEWCOMER BRIJLAL VARMA, ALL JANATA MP'S WHO HAD ALSO BEEN NAMED TO THE CABINET, ALSO WERE ABSENT FROM THE CEREMONY. AFTER A SHORT DELAY, THE 13 JANATA AND ONE AKALI DAL MPS WHO WERE PRESENT WERE SWORN IN. WHEN ASKED BY NEWSMEN WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO RAM AND THE OTHERS, DESAI SNAPPED BACK "THEY WILL COME". AT THE SAME TIME, A CFD SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED THAT THE PARTY WAS "SHOCKED TO READ THE NEWS THIS MORNING THAT MR. JAGJIVAN RAM AND MR. H. N. BAHUGUNA HAVE JOINED THE UNION CABINET. THIS IS INCORRECT." THE SPOKESMAN WENT ON TO SAY THAT RAM AND BAHUGUNA HAD "NEVER JOINED THE CABINET."

3. AT MID-DAY MARCH 26, REPORTS CONTINUE TO CONFLICT ON WHAT PRECISELY HAPPENED LAST NIGHT AND WHY. SAMACHAR QUOTES JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY L.K. ADVANI (A NEW MEMBER OF THE CABINET) AS SAYING THAT WHEN DESAI CALLED ON HIM LAST NIGHT RAM AND BAHUGUNA HAD AGREED TO JOIN THE CABINET AND HAD CONFIRMED THEIR DECISION FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER. ADVANI ADDED: "HALF AN HOUR THEREAFTER, THEY SOUGHT TO BE EXCUSED." AIR  
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NEWS AT MID-DAY REPORTS THAT FERNANDES AND RAJ NARAIN HAD NOT DELIBERATELY FAILED TO APPEAR AT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY, BUT RATHER WERE TIED UP AT THAT TIME TRYING TO PERSUADE RAM AND BAHUGUNA TO RECONSIDER. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE HEARD FROM AN INDIAN JOURNALIST THAT RAJ NARAIN WAS ABSENT BECAUSE HE DID NOT WANT MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THAT GEORGE FERNANDES WAS NOT PRESENT OUT OF SYMPATHY WITH RAM'S GRIEVANCE. (FERNANDES HAD EARLIER EXPRESSED DISMAY AT THE METHOD BY WHICH DESAI HAD BEEN ELECTED.)

4. COMMENT: A PROMINENT JANATA LEADER FROM MAHARASHTRA TOLD THE CHARGE LAST EVENING THAT DESAI HAD BOXED HIMSELF INTO A CORNER DURING HIS CABINET-FORMATION MANEUVERING BY OFFERING THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERSHIP TO BOTH RAM AND CHARAN SINGH. HE EVIDENTLY MANAGED TO EXTRICATE HIMSELF FROM HIS DILEMMA BY ADVISING THE ACTING PRESIDENT THAT THERE WOULD BE NO POSITION OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER; RATHER, IT WAS EVIDENT FROM THE LIST OF MINISTERS RELEASED FROM THE RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN LAST NIGHT THAT CHARAN SINGH AND RAM (IN THAT ORDER)

WOULD BE THE TWO DE FACTO SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE CABINET: THEIR NAMES HEADED THE LIST, WHILE THE OTHER MINISTERS WERE ORDERED ALPHABETICALLY. THE SAME SOURCE TOLD THE CHARGE THAT WHEN THE IMPASSE HAD ARISEN, FIVE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE JANATA HAD BEEN DEPUTED TO SHUTTLE AMONG DESAI, RAM AND CHARAN SINGH TO CONVINCE THEM OF THE NECESSITY OF REACHING A QUICK AND AMIABLE SETTLEMENT FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY. BY MIDNIGHT, IT APPEARED THAT THEIR APPEALS HAD SUCCEEDED.

5. NO ONE HAS A DEFINITIVE EXPLANATION OF THE COLLAPSE OF THE APPARENT JANATA/CFD UNDERSTANDING. ONE POSSIBILITY IS THAT DESAI HAD FINALLY WON OVER RAM LAST NIGHT AND CONVINCED HIM TO JOIN THE CABINET. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, HOWEVER, BAHUGUNA MAY HAVE GOTTEN TO RAM AND PERSUADED HIM TO REVERSE HIS DECISION. AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST WHO WAS AT RAM'S HOUSE LAST NIGHT TELLS US THAT WHEN MORARJI LEFT HE HAD GOTTEN RAM CONFIDENTIAL

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AND BAHUGUNA'S CONSENT TO NAME THEM TO THE CABINET. THE JOURNALIST WAS NOT SURE, HOWEVER, WHETHER DESAI LEARNED OF RAM AND BAHUGUNA'S CHANGE OF HEART LATER THAT NIGHT OR THIS MORNING. ANOTHER VERSION OF THE STORY HAS IT THAT RAM WAS INCENSED THAT CHARAN SINGH PRECEDED HIM ON THE CABINET LIST ISSUED BY THE ACTING PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, WHICH IMPLIED THAT HE WAS TAKING A BACK SEAT TO THE BLD LEADER. HE WAS WILLING TO BE NUMBER TWO AFTER DESAI IN THE CABINET, BUT NOT NUMBER THREE.

6. WHATEVER THE CAUSE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT INTENSE NEGOTIATIONS ARE CONTINUING AT RAM'S HOUSE. A STEADY STREAM OF JANATA LEADERS HAVE BEEN CALLING ON HIM. WHEN HE RETURNED FROM TODAY'S LOK SABHA SESSION (CHICH ELECTED AS SPEAKER N. SANJIVA REDDY, A LONG-TIME CONGRESS (O) LEADER WHO HAD WON AS A JANATA CANDIDATE IN ANDHRA PRADESH), RAM TOLD THE GATHERED CROWDS NOT TO GET DISHEARTENED, ADDING THAT THEY SHOULD TRY TO STRENGTHEN THE CFD. MEANWHILE A GROUP OF SOME ONE HUNDRED PRO-J.P. NARAYAN DEMONSTRATORS HAD GATHERED OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT HOUSE URGING RAM AND THE OTHERS TO JOIN THE CABINET.

7. EMBASSY IS SUBMITTING BY SEPTTEL THE NAMES OF THE 14 MINISTERS WHO WERE SWORN IN THIS MORNING ALONG WITH BRIEF BIO SKETCHES. AS OF 1630 HOURS, DESAI HAD NOT ANNOUNCED THE ASSIGNMENT OF PORTFOLIOS.  
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